

A N

E S S A Y

O N T H E

REWARDS of ETERNITY.

By the Rev. JOSEPH WHITELEY, B. A. /
Of MAGDALEN COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE, and Curate of BEESTON,
in the Parish of LEEDS.

*Published in Compliance with the Will of the late Mr. NORRIS, as having
gained the Annual Prize which he instituted in the University of Cambridge.*



LEEDS: Printed by J. BOWLING;
And Sold by J. JOHNSON, St. Paul's Church-Yard, LONDON;
J. and J. MERRILLS, CAMBRIDGE,
And J. BINNS, LEEDS.

PRICE ONE SHILLING.

Lately published, by the same Author,

1. An Essay on — The ADVANTAGES of REVELATION; the
Prize Essay for the Year 1781.
2. ————— JESUS CHRIST considered as an EXAMPLE
to MANKIND; ditto 1782.
3. ————— The NECESSITY of a REDEEMER; ditto
1783.



A N E S S A Y

O N

The REWARDS of ETERNITY.

IT will appear, from a slight attention to the human constitution, that we are susceptible of pleasure and pain in a much more intense degree than we ever in fact experience. From this capacity of enjoyment and suffering, every enquiry concerning a future life derives importance.¹ A reasonable person would not regard an eternal existence with indifference, even if he could discover nothing moral in the government of the universe: For, although his future destination might not be exactly conformable to his moral condition; yet, since irresistible power could render him happy or miserable beyond conception, the apprehension of that power might embitter his present enjoyments, and could at best only agitate his mind betwixt the extremes of hope and terror.

B

A subject

¹ See *Butler's Analogy*, chap. 2, part 1, page 46; second edition.

A subject of such infinite concern has naturally engaged the attention of thinking men in all ages; and, although some of their conclusions resulted rather from a vigorous imagination, than from the principles of dispassionate reason; yet their researches have been successful, as to the main question, and have produced accumulated evidence of a future existence.

The belief of a future world, among nations not blest with the light of Revelation, is so ancient, that no period can be assigned when it first began to be inculcated. It was taught among the most civilized nations of antiquity, and was incorporated into all their systems of religion. It is transmitted to us indeed under various appearances, and intermixed with fable; which has caused a suspicion that the descriptions of it are mere poetical embellishments, the inventions of redundant fancy: Yet the continual allusions to the metempsychosis, the shady realms of Pluto, and the impartial decisions of Minos, intimate an established belief, not only of a future life, but also of a regular distribution of rewards and punishments.

But how did this belief originate? To assert that it was an Egyptian invention, introduced into Greece by Pythagoras, and established by the magistrate from motives of policy, is but a weak hypothesis; since that belief prevailed among uncivilized nations, who had no intercourse either with the Greeks or Egyptians; and it had evidently obtained among the Greeks in the times of Homer, who lived some ages before Pythagoras. The early prevalence of this doctrine proves it to be agreeable to the common sentiments of mankind: And, as it is probable that the first men would be employed, rather in providing necessary accommodations, than in discovering speculative truths,—this affords
a pre-

a presumption that it was originally revealed; especially as there is express historical testimony that this doctrine was first introduced by Revelation.²

Philosophers began early to enquire what arguments could be discovered from the attributes of the Deity; from the constitution of the world; the nature of man; and the œconomy of providence; to confirm this general opinion. Socrates and Plato argued from common consent; Xenophon from the strong impulse to glory and ardent passion for immortality, peculiar to great and good men;³ Cicero from the faculties of the soul; its wonderful activity; its power of interesting the present moment with recollection of the past and anticipation of the future; and its capacity of endless improvement in knowledge and virtue.⁴

From the dawn of philosophy, the soul was believed to be a distinct substance from the body. Whatever differences of opinion obtained among the Theists, concerning the specific nature of the soul, they generally agreed that it was separable from the body: And even those who held the soul to be a modification of subtile and refined matter, believed it might, not only survive the dissolution of its organized tenement, but even be naturally indiscerptible and immortal.

The promiscuous distribution of good and evil, whilst it afforded a theme of endless declamation against a providence, to all the Atheists from Democritus and Epicurus, furnished to the
Theists

² See *Butler's Anal. chap. 6, page 172.* ³ *Leunclavius' Xenophon, book 8, sec. 47.* ⁴ *Cicero's first book of Tusculan Questions, and the conclusion of his Cato Major.*

Theists an excellent argument for a future state. They were sensible that external advantages of fortune; strength, agility, and gracefulness of person; acuteness of penetration; solidity of judgment; and sweetness of temper, were sometimes united in a very unworthy character: Whilst a man of integrity was often oppressed and insulted; exposed to the struggles of contending passions and inveterate distempers; and his consolations overclouded by a constitutional gloom and melancholy. As they could not reconcile these disorders of the moral world to their ideas of the divine perfections, they naturally inferred a state of retribution; wherein perfect order should succeed the present irregularities, and virtue obtain its full reward.

Although the ancient philosophers might probably excel the moderns, in strength of genius and sublimity of conception; yet, their conclusions were less accurate, and their discoveries circumscribed within more narrow limits. They had little experience to guide their researches; they had the unknown regions of truth to explore, with no other guide than the doubtful light of nature; of course their discoveries were imperfect and partial: Whereas we have the experience of ages before us; our path is illuminated, not only with the glimmerings of our own reason, but also with the knowledge reflected to us from every age and nation; and with many important truths of Revelation, which have been insensibly mistaken for the discoveries of reason. Our arguments then ought to challenge considerable superiority over theirs, in point of accuracy, certainty and force.

This superiority is no where more discernible than in our conclusions with respect to the Rewards of Eternity. The nature of these rewards was grossly mistaken, and the evidence of them so incomplete

incomplete as to leave the most philosophic mind in painful suspense. In the calm moments of retreat, the philosophers seemed to exult in the hope of eternal felicity; they expressed their feelings with the most glowing and animated eloquence; and declared their expectations of immortality to be the source of their purest enjoyments: Yet, at the prospect of dissolution, they reviewed the evidences of the invisible world with a mixture of conviction, incredulity, and despondency; and alternately relinquished, and eagerly grasped at, every argument which indulged their hopes beyond the grave.⁵

The evidence for immortality now rests on a more solid basis. The arguments formerly alledged have been illustrated, improved and confirmed. The nature of the soul has been more philosophically investigated; and, from its operations of thought, volition, and memory, so essentially distinct from the known properties of matter; from its absolute command over the body; from its power of abstracting itself in dreams and profound thought, so far as to disregard the objects that solicit the senses; from its facility of inventing, arranging, combining and diversifying its ideas, and thereby forming an intellectual creation of its own; and, above all, from preserving its identity and indivisible consciousness, whilst the body undergoes a gradual but total alteration;—from these properties, the immateriality of the soul has been argued with such clearness and cogency, as render its evidence little inferior to demonstrative.⁶ The direct consequence of the immateriality of the soul is its eternal duration; for what is incorporeal cannot naturally be subject to that decomposition of parts which destroys the mechanism of the body. But,

⁵ XVIth *Epistle of Horace*, book 1; *Cicero*, *pro. Cluent. & Tusc. Quest.* l. 1, c. 11. ⁶ *Clarke's Letter to Dodwell. Bp. of Chester's Sermons*, page 100, second edit. *Butler's Anal.* chap. 1.

But, admitting the omnipotence of the Deity, the duration of our existence must depend on the divine will. For, could the soul be proved to be a system of organized matter, omnipotence could preserve it from dissolution: Or, could its spiritual nature be demonstrated, the same almighty power which conferred, might at pleasure withdraw, its existence. Whatever then be the specific nature of the soul, no certain conclusion can be inferred from it, antecedently to the will of the Deity; and that will cannot be ascertained, previously to the knowledge of his moral character.

This character is displayed in every page of Revelation, and is abundantly confirmed on the principles of reason. The final causes of pleasure and pain, together with the appearances of design, imply an intelligent Governor, but by no means determine whether his government be equitable or tyrannical:⁷ Yet, the necessity of punishing actions subversive of public order; the natural rewards of virtuous actions, considered as virtuous, independently of their consequences; the tendency of virtue to procure more advantages than its temporary obstacles at present permit; and, above all, that moral perception whereby we discern the essential difference of our actions, and become conscious of good and ill desert;—these advantages on the side of virtue evince the establishment of a moral government, however imperfect; are express declarations, from the Governor of the World, that he is not indifferent to virtue and vice; and afford a strong presumption that virtue, and order, and regularity will finally prevail.⁸

The apprehension then of eternal rewards is deeply founded in reason. The objections however of the Atheists have been diligently

⁷ *Butler's Anal. chap. 3, p. 65, 66.*

⁸ *Butler's Anal. chap. 3. throughout.*

gently revived, and carefully disseminated. The celebrated position of the Epicureans, that the body and soul grow up and die together; the irregular distribution of good and evil; together with the maxim of *Whatever is is right*, have been industriously obtruded on the attention of mankind: But, far from invalidating the evidence of future rewards, they have served indirectly to confirm it, by promoting a more close and free enquiry. The arguments which seemed to triumph, during the times of ignorance, have gradually lost their force; and their specious colouring has disappeared at the superior light of Revelation, and the collateral improvement of reason. The grand objection from the œconomy of Providence is completely obviated on the Christian hypothesis, that the present life was designed as a state, not of reward, but of moral improvement and probationary discipline.

Considerable as the evidence above stated may appear, it is by no means so perfect as to supersede the necessity of Revelation. It is sufficient indeed to dissipate much of the mist of doubt and perplexity which enveloped the invisible world, and to elucidate and recommend the discoveries of the Gospel. To reject it therefore as nugatory, would be equally absurd with the opposite extreme of depreciating Revelation as needless. Each has its separate and distinct province; and, when viewed in connection, they appear mutually to strengthen and confirm each other. Reason inspires hopes of eternal rewards: Revelation matures hope into certainty. Reason affords belief to the philosophic mind: Revelation imparts conviction to the peasant, as well as to the philosopher. Both coincide in the principal point; but Revelation draws aside the veil which intercepts the eye of reason, and unfolds the *nature and foundation* of the Rewards of Eternity.

Admitting the law of nature to have been sufficient for direction in morals; yet, as it has not the promise of Eternal Life, it could not have established our hopes on a solid foundation: And, as it provides no remission of guilt incurred by the violation of its precepts, it could never supersede the necessity of that expiatory sacrifice which was made in the person of our Redeemer. It is the general sense of scripture, that, as death was introduced by the transgression of Adam, eternal life was purchased by the death of Christ.

In the early times of Revelation, the plan of Redemption was præfigured by sensible images. The distinguished events, and the religious institutions, of the Jewish nation, were designed to adumbrate the circumstances of the Redemption. Saint Paul contends that Jesus Christ was the end of the law; and that the principal events of his life were accomplishments of what was before typified, by a corresponding institution in the civil or ecclesiastical polity of the Jews⁹. Thus the deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, and their establishment in the promised land, are figures of the redemption of mankind from sin and misery; and of that rest which the Gospel has revealed to be the future inheritance of the faithful. The intended sacrifice of Isaac; the remedy of the brazen serpent; the expiation of national crimes by national sacrifices, and by the ceremonies and offices of the Levitical priesthood, are evident patterns of their great Archetype, in that character, in which he is styled the Saviour of the World. The prophecies marked with precision the time, place, and character of the Messiah; and described the end of his sufferings with uncommon variety and energy of expression.

The benevolent plan of Redemption was at length compleated;
and.

⁹ *Hebrews* viii. ix. & x.

[II]

and the same Gospel, which announced the death of our Redeemer, declared his blood to be the foundation, and his resurrection the evidence, of life and immortality. By this extraordinary condescension of the Son of God, we are, "begotten again to lively hopes;" we have access to "a better country, which is an heavenly;" and immortality is changed from a curse to a blessing. The blessedness of this heavenly state is so transporting, as to surpass our most elevated conceptions: For "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart to conceive, the things which God has prepared for them that love him."

Curiosity has often attempted to pry into the future administration of providence. The pride of philosophy has presumed to assign some determinate form and consistency to the invisible objects of its hopes: But herein its powers have failed; and its conclusions have outdone, in extravagance and absurdity, even the folly of superstition, and the madness of enthusiasm. Revelation alone proposes a rational system of rewards.

The description of these rewards is indeed general and figurative; as it was intended, not to gratify our curiosity, but to influence our conduct: Yet its metaphors are striking, and its images splendid; strongly impressing the imagination with the most sublime and lasting ideas. The happiness of the blessed is intimated by whatever is esteemed excellent among men; as pleasure, power, dignity, joy, and victory; and these materials of bliss are happily represented by the symbols of a marriage festival, of palms and white robes, and of crowns of glory reserved in heaven.

From the several descriptions of the Rewards of Eternity, many particulars of great importance may be distinctly ascertained; as,

that our bodies shall be glorified; that we shall rest from our labours; that we shall progressively improve in knowledge and virtue; that we shall cultivate the society of the more exalted orders of beings; and that we shall contemplate and adore the most glorious attributes of the Deity.

The scripture continually reminds us that the present life was not designed to be a state of calmness and tranquillity, but of temptation and trial, of struggle and contest. Besides the ordinary calamities of human nature, we have to contend with our own impetuous appetites and passions, with the opposition of the world, and the wiles of our spiritual adversary: but, in a perfect state, our warfare will be ended; and the labours of the church militant will be succeeded by the rest of the church triumphant.¹⁰

In our present state, we can form no adequate conception of what the scripture calls a glorious body¹¹. We cannot understand, either its physical essence, or its mode of existence: But we can easily conceive that it may be united to the soul, so as to preserve identity of person; and therefore, on the principles of Christianity, all those difficulties vanish which have been urged against the propriety of rewarding the soul, in a separate existence, for actions performed when in conjunction with the body. We can also conceive that our bodies may be purged from their present imperfections; and, instead of clogging the soul, may admit, and even assist, the free exercise of all its faculties.

That there will be scope for exercising these faculties to all eternity, no one can doubt, who considers the very superficial acquaintance

¹⁰ *Rev.* xiv. 13. *Heb.* iv. 9. ¹¹ *1. Cor.* xv. 42, &c. *Phil.* iii. 20, 21.

ance which the most acute understanding can form, in this life, with the works of creation, providence and redemption. Our ideas are confined within very scanty limits; for, besides the intuitive knowledge of our own existence, and the demonstrative evidence of the existence of God, we know nothing of other beings, independently of Revelation, but through the inlet of the senses¹²: And as we inhabit a point only of the universe, the greatest part of the creation is too remote to be sensibly perceived.

Besides, of the beings within our reach, there are innumerable orders which by their minuteness escape observation; and, of those with which our senses are conversant, we can neither assign the qualities which co-exist in the same substance, nor discover the constitution of those insensible particles, on which the properties of body depend. Even from comparing the ideas we have acquired, there arises an endless diversity of relations, habitudes and connections, which the short period of life does not permit us to trace.

In proportion as the mind is furnished with new accessions of knowledge, its powers become more vigorous and comprehensive. Yet the keenest understanding is encountered by insuperable difficulties, in almost every branch of science and every production of nature¹³. When we examine the composition of a grain of sand, the structure and machinery of a plant, or the more complex and stupendous organization of an animal, we admire the wisdom and contrivance of the workman who produced such various beings from the simple elements of earth, air, fire and water: But when we examine these elements by an experimental process, we are surprised to find that they are themselves compounded of other materials; which, for any thing

¹² *Locke's Essay on Human Understanding, book iv. chap. 3.*

¹³ *Bishop of Chester's Sermons, page 116.*

thing we know, may be compounds also; and their materials compounded of others in infinitum.

Such is our ignorance of the material world: Our knowledge of the intellectual is still more confined. Betwixt the Supreme Being and ourselves there are orders of spirits of different capacities; but how they exist, in what manner they communicate their ideas, to what extent of knowledge they may attain, and to what degree of bliss they are admitted, we have not the least information, either from our senses, from reason, or from Revelation.

Limited as our knowledge appears, it is seldom acquired without intense and painful application. From the intimate and sympathetic union of the soul with the body, the pursuit of knowledge is accompanied with fatigue; and sometimes with depression of spirits and decay of health; besides, modest merit is often treated with supercilious neglect: Yet, the discovery of truth is always attended with a degree of pleasure in proportion to its importance, which is sufficient to outweigh all its painful appendages.

This pleasure will assist us to form some conception of our future happiness, when every obstacle to knowledge shall be removed; when the boundless treasures of creation shall be unlocked; when we shall discover the hidden springs of life and vegetation; when we shall learn the number, the magnitudes, the distances and the laws of the great bodies of the universe; for what purposes they were created, with what accommodations they are furnished, and by what beings they are inhabited¹⁴; when we shall comprehend the whole scale of existence; the relations we sustain, and the rank we bear among intelligent beings; and above all, when we shall contemplate the nature, the perfections and the purposes of the Deity;

¹⁴ *Spectator*, No. 635.

Deity, together with the manner in which his Providence operates on the natural and moral world; and when we shall know more and more of those mysteries of Redemption, “ which at present the “ Angels desire to look into.” “ Now we know in part and we “ prophesy in part, but when that which is perfect is come, then that “ which is in part shall be done away. Now we see through a “ glass darkly, but then face to face: Now I know in part, but “ then shall I know even as also I am known.”¹⁵

The pleasures of the imagination, although less refined, are as transporting as those of the understanding¹⁶. We are charmed with whatever is great, uncommon or beautiful. Every object, which presents itself to the eye, exhibits such variety of colouring, such a combination of light and shade, and such agreeable arrangement and symmetry of parts, as transmit the most pleasing images to the imagination. Perhaps indeed the objects which display the imaginary beauties of colour may be divested hereafter of their present appearances¹⁷: And, if it be not probable that they may excite ideas as pleasing, if not of the same kind, by means very different from the emission or reflection of light; at least, we may retain those pleasing ideas with which our minds are already stored, and be able to combine and diversify them to all eternity. The pleasures of beauty are obviously designed to fill our minds with complacency in beholding the works of nature: those of novelty are intended to stimulate us in the pursuit of knowledge; and those of greatness to prepare us for that astonishment and devotion with which our imaginations must be almost infinitely distended, when we are admitted to the immediate presence of the Deity.

It is essential to the perfection of our nature, that our present faculties

¹⁵ 1 Cor. xiii. 9.

¹⁶ *Spectator*, No. 411.

¹⁷ *Spectator*, No. 413.

culties of reason and imagination be preserved and improved. The entire use of these faculties has been retained by some persons, even in their last moments; and it is incredible that they should be destroyed in the last period of a disorder, by which they had not been at all impaired throughout its whole progress.¹⁸

The acquisition of certain capacities and qualifications is necessary to the enjoyment of the present life; and therefore similar capacities may be necessary to qualify us for a future one¹⁹. Reason has suggested, and Revelation has abundantly confirmed the apprehension, that our present discipline was intended to form habits of piety and virtue. Daily experience shews that there is an inseparable connection between virtue and happiness: For happiness arises from the equable composure of the mind, which virtue has a peculiar tendency to render tranquil and serene.

External circumstances may considerably affect our enjoyments but can never constitute them. Purity of intention and integrity of conduct inspire a satisfaction which no external disadvantages can destroy; whilst our irregular desires and guilty passions are sources of the most extreme misery. In this world, the fairest character is sullied with blemishes and imperfections: Yet, strangers as we are to spotless innocence, we are sometimes sensible of its original beauty; and may therefore frame some distant, although very inadequate, conception of that happy state, where virtue shall be accompanied with every circumstance which can heighten felicity; where we shall go on from strength to strength, and from glory to glory; and where we shall continually approach that awful Being, who, as he is infinitely holy, is also infinitely happy.

As

¹⁸ Butl. Anal. chap. 1. p. 37.

¹⁹ Butl. Anal. chap. 5. p. 118.

As social qualifications are necessary for a future life, it is clear that our condition hereafter will be, not of the solitary, but the social kind. Perhaps nothing can spread such a melancholy gloom over the mind as the apprehension of continual solitude. We were formed for activity and a reciprocation of kind offices, which kindle the most glowing affections of the soul, and touch every spring of pleasing sensibility. We are prompted therefore to social intercourse by native instincts more than by mutual convenience. Yet the pleasures of society are often greatly allayed by accidental circumstances; such as the treachery of friends, the malice of enemies, the competition of the same advantages, and the peculiarities of temper.

Even in the purest friendships, the collision of opposite interests often strikes out the sparks of jealousy, suspicion and resentment. But, when the most worthy characters are selected from the polluted multitude; when every competition is removed; when every malignant passion is subdued; and when every action is tempered with benevolence; how exquisitely tender, how inconceivably transporting, will be the pleasures of friendship.

This reflection cheered the hopes of the ancient philosophers, who could form no picture of happiness more complete than that of renewing their friendships with the most distinguished men²⁰. But Christianity inspires hopes still more exalted; for, besides opening to us access to patriarchs, prophets and apostles, it permits us to cultivate an eternal friendship with cherubim and seraphim, and the innumerable host of glorious beings who invest the throne of the Almighty²¹.

C To

²⁰ *The Conclusion of Cicero's Cato Major.*

²¹ *Heb. xii. 22, 23.*

To apprehend the mode of our intercourse with these happy spirits, and to estimate the bliss which will result from their society, requires, not only their faculties, but also an actual participation of their felicity. And if the enjoyments and operations of created beings are not intelligible to our present understandings, the nature and perfections of the Creator must be absolutely incomprehensible.

In these regions of exile, we discover only the glimmerings of his presence; in heaven he will render himself the object of more immediate intuition. Although his nature can never be fully apprehended by the utmost stretch of imagination; although we must be dazzled with beholding even the skirts of his glory; yet, he will condescend to accommodate himself to our weak capacities, in such a manner as will render his presence supportable; and his infinite goodness²², holiness²³, power²⁴, and wisdom²⁵, will be a theme of everlasting praise and adoration.

In our common estimates of happiness, we are apt to include the blandishments of sense; and indeed, it is not easy, nor perhaps necessary, to exclude every sensitive enjoyment from our ideas of felicity: But, the flavour of the most exquisite tastes; the combination of the most harmonious sounds; and the prospect of the most refreshing landscape, convey but faint images of happiness, when compared with the presence of the Fountain of beauty and felicity; whom the understanding shall for ever contemplate, and in whom the affections shall for ever delight.

Although these rewards are inconceivably great; yet, in condescension to our feeble apprehensions, they are thus sketched out, under sensible images, by the pencil of inspiration. "The Lamb
" which

²² Rev. v. 9, 10.

²³ Rev. xv. 4.

²⁴ Rev. xix. 6.

²⁵ Rev. v. 12.

“ which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall
 “ lead them unto living fountains of waters ; and God shall wipe
 “ away all tears from their eyes. And there shall be no more death,
 “ neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain ;
 “ for the former things are passed away, and behold all things are
 “ new. There shall be no night there, and they need no candle,
 “ neither light of the sun ; for the Lord God giveth them light,
 “ and shall make them drink of the river of his pleasures : And
 “ they shall reign for ever and ever.”²⁶

The prospect of these transporting joys is sufficient to dissipate the visionary horrors of death, and to administer the most cheering consolation to the faithful Christian. He no longer apprehends a state of gloomy solitude or of languid indifference ; but he expects a renewal of his dearest and most tender connections ; and already anticipates those pleasures which will flow from the presence of his Saviour. He aspires to testify his gratitude to that glorious Being who accomplished his redemption. He longs to depart “ that he
 “ may be with Christ,” and “ behold his glory :” It is his consolation, amidst all the troubles of life, that in another world he
 “ shall be for ever with the Lord.”

To be stimulated by these hopes of felicity to an active course of virtue is so far from destroying the moral nature of our conduct, that it is consistent with the most perfect human character. We must cease to be men, before we cease to regard our interest ; and therefore we impose upon ourselves when we disclaim the principle of Self-love : We imagine ourselves superior beings, when we assert that our motives to action are wholly disinterested ; that our virtue springs from a noble impulse within ; and that it would be contaminated by a regard to future happiness.

C 2

It

It is easy to insinuate, that the hope of Eternal Rewards is mercenary and servile ; that it damps the benevolent and heroic affections ; and that it introduces a criminal selfishness and narrowness of mind. The Author of these insinuations ought to have considered, that, if well-founded, they would be subversive of what he himself calls the proper incentives to virtue : For the hope of present rewards is surely as mercenary as that of distant ones ; and the design of the second book of the Characteristics is to shew that our obligation to virtue is founded on its tendency to procure the greatest happiness in the present world. And if virtue be amiable in itself, because it promotes the happiness both of individuals and of society ; how much more amiable must it appear, when, to its present advantages, are superadded The Rewards of Eternity.

All objections of this kind may be obviated by an argument suggested by the common sense, and founded on the common observation, of mankind. Whatever is useful in itself, or beneficial in its consequences, derives its moral nature from the dispositions of mind which produced it : These dispositions are influenced, if not wholly formed, by education : And the benefit of education is confessedly owing to the salutary discipline of rewards and punishments. Education then is an instance, wherein it is universally allowed that virtuous dispositions may be acquired by the influence of hope and fear : And therefore, it is no disparagement to the virtues of the Christian, that they were expanded and ennobled by the rewards of the Gospel.

As the nature and degree of these rewards are perhaps not perfectly intelligible to human faculties, they are represented, with great propriety, by images borrowed from whatever is esteemed excellent or desirable. The most superficial observer will instantly perceive, that the decorations of the New Jerusalem were neither
meant.

meant nor understood in the literal sense. Yet, whether from prejudice or perverseness, a celebrated Historian has insinuated that they were designed to impose upon the primitive Christians, by feeding their avarice. With this view he asserts that the New Jerusalem was quickly adorned with all the gayest colours of the imagination. "A garden of Eden, with the amusements of the pastoral life, was no longer suited to the advanced state of human society which prevailed under the Roman Empire. A city was therefore erected of gold and precious stones"²⁷.

Had these decorations of the Holy City related to the Millenium, according to the assumed hypothesis; or, had the speedy coming of Christ been generally taught and expected; the gold and precious stones might have been treated as pious frauds, invented to allure the Jews and Pagans into the Christian church. But the happiness of the New Jerusalem is described in the book of Revelations as posterior to the general resurrection²⁸; and the Christians were expressly taught not to expect that wonderful event, until many ages had elapsed, and many corruptions of the Gospel had been introduced²⁹. The historian's insinuation must therefore appear groundless, since it is founded on false assumptions; and since, moreover, enjoyments of a worldly nature are professedly excluded from the scriptural idea of happiness.

This happiness is portrayed in such lively colours as impress the imagination with the most pleasurable sensations. Yet a Writer, distinguished for metaphysical acumen, and for subtilty and profoundness of reasoning, has ventured to affirm "that there never was a popular religion which represented the state of departed souls

²⁷ *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1st 4to. edit. p. 471, vol. 1. ²⁸ *Rev.* xx. compared with xxi. ²⁹ 2 *Thessal.* ii. 3.

“souls in such a light as would render it eligible for human kind
“that there should be such a state”³⁰.

Affertions of this kind require no formal confutation, as they have obviously originated either from the pride of singularity or the fascinating power of prejudice.

As the enemies of Christianity have assumed the most opposite characters, they have not scrupled to try any mode of attack which promised success. Some contend that the Rewards of Eternity ought not to have been discovered³¹; whilst others complain, that they are too imperfectly revealed to answer any useful purpose³². Not to mention the presumptuous impiety of thus arraigning the wisdom of the divine councils at the bar of human reason, it may be distinctly answered, that, if our views of future happiness were more imperfect, they could not dissolve our attachment to the objects of sense, nor even suggest the idea that we are candidates for immortality. For the passions impel us to the eager pursuit of present enjoyments, which the imagination gilds with delusive charms; and if the understanding also become subservient to sensual desires, no objects but those of sense will be motives to action.

On the other hand, an intuitive perception of the happiness of the blessed would defeat the end of our present existence³³. The relations

³⁰ *Dialogues of Natural Religion*, p. 257. Mr. Hume's celebrated Argument against a Future State, founded on our imperfect knowledge of the Divine Justice, is sufficiently refuted by his own reflections on the promiscuous distribution of good and evil, in the twenty-first of his Moral and Political Essays.

³¹ *Bolingbroke's Encomiums on the Clearness, Precision and Sanctions of the Law of Nature*, vol. 5, p. 90, 96, and the 2d vol. of the *Charact. Passim*.

³² *Dial. of Natural Religion*, p. 257. ³³ *Blair's Sermons*, vol. 1. p. 97, 98. 5th edition.

relations of social, civil and domestic life; the distinctions of property; and the mutual obligations of superior and subordinate ranks, indicate, that the present life was designed to be, not only active, but also probationary: And the difficulty of preserving rectitude of conduct, and the temptations to deviate from our duty, are admirably fitted to exercise our active powers, and to discover and purify our moral characters.

The trial of virtue, then, depends wholly on the competition betwixt temptation and duty. Remove temptation, and you destroy at once all discrimination of character, and even the possibility of probationary discipline. Now, admitting the sensible perception of Eternal Rewards, every temptation to vice instantly disappears; the most necessary employments seem childish amusements; our affections are immoveably fixed on the objects of another world, and life itself becomes a burthen.

It is obvious from these and other instances, that, if the conduct of Providence should be superseded by the plans of human wisdom, infinite disorder would be introduced into the moral world. Instead therefore of amusing ourselves with imaginary improvements upon Providence, let us adore that consummate wisdom which has veiled our future life with such obscurity³⁴ as preserves an equal conflict betwixt faith and sense, and which submits to our choice the pleasures of the world or the Rewards of Eternity.

If these rewards appear more attractive to the eye of reason, let us not hesitate to make them the objects of our steady pursuit:

Let

³⁴ *Prudens futuri temporis exitum
Caliginosâ nocte premit Deus.*

Hor. ode 29. lib. 3.

Let us instantly begin the career of virtue, according to the directions of the Gospel, by eradicating our criminal habits; by subduing our disorderly passions; by confirming every upright principle; and by cultivating a spirit of universal benevolence and unaffected piety.

conduct, and the temptations to deviate from our
minutely fitted to exercise our active powers, and to discover and
purify our moral characters.

The trial of virtue, then, depends wholly on the competition be-
tween temptation and duty. Remove temptation, and you destroy
at once all discrimination of character, and even the possibility of
probationary discipline. Now, admitting the feasible perception
of Human Nature, *N*ot *E*very *E*vil is *T*he *T*rial
the most necessary employment of our childish amusements; our
affections are immovably fixed on the objects of another world,
and life itself becomes a



It is obvious from these and other instances, that if the course
of Providence should be impeded by the plans of human wisdom,
infinite disorder would be introduced into the moral world. In-
stead therefore of amusing ourselves with imaginary improvements
upon Providence, let us adore that consummate wisdom which has
veiled our future life with such obscurity, as preserves an equal
conflict between flesh and soul, and which submits to our choice
the pleasures of the world or the rewards of eternity.

If these rewards appear more attractive to the eye of reason,
let us not hesitate to make them the objects of our steady pursuit:
let

44 Printed by J. G. Smith, at the
Cambridge and Westminster Press.
Hon. Secy. R. G.